



THE HOLY QUR'AN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

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(Al-Rum, 30:41)

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Executive Summary

This paper introduces the subject of Islam and the Environment through four areas:

First, it discusses the Islamic view of the environment: the Holy Qur'an speaks of how God created the environment with Truth, and how everything in the environment is His sign and praises Him. The Holy Qur'an thus shows the inherent value of creatures and of life, and how each creature in nature must be respected and cherished by human beings as their fellow beings.

Second, this paper asks what the relationship between man and the environment is. How is man to act towards the environment? God created man as His vicegerent (*khalīfa*) on earth, making the earth a dwelling place for man, and ensured that man's needs could be provided by the earth. Man has the right to use the earth, the animals, and the minerals to help him in his stay on earth. However, with this right comes the responsibility of manifesting the qualities of the Creator, which have

been placed in man's primordial nature (*fitra*), the primary ones being Mercy and Justice.

Third, this paper discusses human corruption and how it is linked to environmental pollution. The Holy Qur'an sets out complete spiritual and moral guidelines for man. He is told to *walk humbly* (*Luqmān*, 31:19); not to be wasteful or extravagant; not to disrupt the balance that exists in nature and not to change the creation of God. In our time all of these commandments are ignored, and in fact their opposites are looked upon favourably. To live in such a manner throws creation out of balance, and this can only have serious repercussions for the world in which we live.

Fourth and last, this paper shows how human purification can help address the environmental crisis. For to deal effectively with the environmental crisis, its root causes must be addressed. These root causes are not merely the dominance of materialistic attitudes, which are directly responsible for the crisis, but human moral corruption in general, which has, through corruption

of the earth's spiritual ambiance, corrupted the earth's blessings and therefore its physical environment as well. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> *Corruption has appeared on earth and at sea because of what the hands of men have wrought; in order that God may make them taste the consequences of their actions; so that they might return* [*that is: so that they might return to God*] (*Al-Rum*, 30:41)

Chapter 1: The Sacredness of the Environment

(A) Creation

God says in the Holy Qur'an that:

> *We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in play* (*Al-Dukhan*, 44:38)

He also says that:

> *We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them save with truth* . . . (*Al-Hijr*, 15:85)

These verses tell us that there is a meaning and a purpose behind God's creation. The created environment is not just a random form, but rather a reflection of the Truth, which is one of the Divine names. Indeed, the environment manifests and reflects a number of the Divine Names and Qualities. These Qualities are made known to us by the Creator's own description of Himself in the

Qur’an. Four of these Divine Names are given in the following verse:

> *He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward …* (*Al-Hadid*, 57:3).

What do we understand by the name The Outward (*Al-Thahir*)? The Outward is that which surrounds us, hence our natural surroundings, the environment. Thus God is informing us that the environment is a reflection of the Name *Al-Thahir*. This is confirmed by the following verse:

> *Unto God belong the East and the West. So wherever ye turn, there is the face of God*.
> (*Al-Baqara*, 2:115)

These two verses confirm the mystery of the presence of God in the natural world. This natural world was created by Him, for His purpose and that in itself confers upon the natural environment a sacredness which must be recognised by all believers. This, then, means that all believers must have the utmost care and respect towards nature.

Moreover, believers must also recognise that after He created the world, God did not just leave creation to be an independent reality existing by itself. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> *God produceth creation, then He reproduceth it* ... (*Al-Rum*, 30:11)

And also:

> *... He multiplieth in creation what He will* ... (*Fatir*, 35:1)

And of course all of this happens through God's knowledge:

> *... not a leaf falleth but He knoweth it* (*Al-An'am*, 6:59)

These verses make very clear God's activity and knowledge in His creation. The believer must be fully aware of this activity and knowledge and ponder the consequences of everything he does as he interacts with the environment. God is active in His creation now; and He knows every detail.

Two further points about creation which serve to in-

crease our reverential attitude toward it are given in the following verses:

> *Assuredly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of mankind; but most of mankind know not* (*Ghafir*, 40:57)

and

> *…Thou canst see no fault in the Beneficent One's creation* … (*Al-Mulk*, 67:3)

The complexity, beauty and harmony of creation are awe inspiring, and even non-religious people cannot fail to be impressed by it.

(B) The Ayat (signs, verses) of God

The natural phenomena of the environment are referred to as '*ayat*' (signs), which is the same word used to describe the verses of the Qur'an.

> *Lo! In the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the difference of night and day are signs for men of understanding* (*Aal 'Imran*, 3:190)

> *Lo! In the difference of day and night and all that Allah hath created in the heavens and the earth are signs, verily, for folk who ward off evil*. (*Yunus*, 10:6)

This shows us that the environment can be viewed as a cosmic Qur'an, with natural phenomena corresponding to the verses of a book which are to be read. These verses may be read, as the two above verses remind us, by *men of understanding* and *folk who ward off evil.* This means that there are lessons to be learned from the environment. By just observing, or being in nature we should be able to gain some profound knowledge or insight into the workings of the cosmos, about the Creator or indeed about ourselves.

The sacred significance of the phenomena of virgin nature is also made explicitly clear by the verses of the Qur'an themselves. God takes oaths by many of the natural phenomena: *By the Sun and her brightness* (*Al-Shams,* 91:1); *By the Night when it enshroudeth* (*Al-Layl,* 92:1)', *I swear by the planets* (*Al-Takwir,* 81:15) etc. The

Qur'an is absolutely remarkable for the range and depth and subtlety with which it makes reference to the phenomena of virgin nature; no other scripture contains so many references to the beauties of the natural world. Many chapter headings indicate the importance of the natural world, such as: 'Thunder', 'The Star', 'The Moon', 'The Sun', 'Dawn', 'Morning Hours', 'The Sand Dunes', 'Smoke', 'The Winnowing Winds', 'Iron', 'The Ants', 'The Bees', 'The Spider', 'Cattle', 'The Elephant', 'The Fig', and so on. This constant reference to the phenomena of virgin nature invites people to contemplate, to meditate, to reflect on the signs of virgin nature as being expressions of the Divine creativity, and thus of being holy in their very substance.

> *Will they not regard the camels, how they are created?/ And the sky, how it is raised?/ And the mountains, how they are set up?/ And the earth, how it is spread?* (*Al-Ghashiyah,* 88:17-20)

> *Those [the men of understanding] who remember God, standing, sitting, and reclin-*

ing, and consider the creation of the heavens and the earth. (*Aal 'Imran*, 3:191)

(C) 'Everything Praises Him'

Every single thing in creation glorifies and praises God.

> *The seven Heavens and the Earth and all that they contain glorifies Him; nor is there anything that does not glorify Him in praise; yet you understand not their praise* … (*Al-Isra'*, 17:44; see also 57:1; 59:1; 61:1; 62:1; 64:1; 24:41 and 59:24)

This in itself is enough to explain another facet of the Islamic attitude towards the environment: whether we understand it or not, everything in nature is God's creation that constantly praises God; the mountains, seas, trees, sun, moon, stars etc and all living creatures hymn His praise. Everything and every natural phenomenon must thus be respected for its being a creation of God, and / or for being a sign of God, and for its devotion to

God. Indeed, the Remembrance of God is in every single thing down to the smallest insect. God makes this abundantly clear in the Holy Qur'an:

> *God is not ashamed to strike a similitude even of a gnat, or anything beyond it; as for the believers, they know it is the truth from their Lord; but as for disbelievers, they say, 'What did God desire by this for a similitude?' Thereby, He leads many astray and thereby He guides many; and thereby He leads none astray except the wicked.* (*Al-Baqara*, 2:26)

> *O mankind, a similitude is being struck, so listen to it: truly those on whom you call besides God will never create a fly even if they rallied together to do so. And if a fly should take away something from them, they would not be able to recover that from it. Feeble is the seeker and the [thing] sought.* (*Al-Hajj*, 22:73)

Muslims thus need to be aware of the origin, beauty, function and mystery of everything in creation. The recitation of the Holy Qur'an itself helps Muslims do this.

For example, in the following verse, after providing the mental key to understanding the environment, the Holy Qur'an proceeds to provide an existential key to this understanding.

> *Do you not see that everything that is in the heavens and the earth praises God? And the birds with wings outspread? Of each He knoweth the worship and the praise ('wa'l-tayru sāfātin—kullun qad 'alima salātahu wa tasbīha') …* (*Al-Nur*, 24:41)

When reciting these words according to *tajwid* (ritually correct intonation) one cannot escape the onomatopoeic effect of the '*alif*' (the vowel 'a') in the word '*sāfātin*' which must be prolonged to at least 6 beats: the result is that one recites the word in a manner which evokes the reality of the flight of the birds. This enables the attentive reciter or the listener of the Holy Qur'an to experience the praise of all things not just as a theoretical or mental understanding concept but as an actualised reality through the very sound of the Qur'an. The impact of this then should gradually sensitise Muslims to the univer-

sal praise and glorification in the environment and in nature.

Moreover, there is more then just existential praise of God in nature. There is praise that is active, aware and deliberate. God gives us insight into this in the following verse about bees:

> *Your Lord has revealed unto [awha] the bee: 'make your home in the mountains, and on the trees, and the trellises which they erect; / then eat from every fruit and follow humbly the ways of your Lord'. There comes forth from their bellies a drink of diverse hues, wherein is a cure for mankind.*
> (*Al-Nahl*, 16:68-9)

Thus even the tiny bee receives a form of Revelation ('*wahi*') from God. 'Revelation' here can perhaps be understood to mean that 'inspired instinct' which is given naturally to all creatures to: (1) follow their instincts for growth, self-preservation and reproduction (*make your home in the mountains, and on the trees, and the trellises which they erect; then eat from every fruit*) and (2) wor-

ship God in their own way (*and follow humbly the ways of your Lord*). Comparing the second aspect of this form of 'inspiration' to creatures with the Revelation granted human beings through God's Messengers, we see that the mass of human beings, in their 'fallen state' in the post-Edenic period, have to learn to do through Supernatural Revelation, what bees (and other animals and creatures) are given naturally. Now the worth of creatures is in their real consciousness (and therefore piety, '*taqwa*') for God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> *O mankind! We have indeed created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may come to know one another. Truly the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most pious (atqa) among you. Truly God is Knower, Aware.*
> (*Al-Hujurat*, 49:13)

It thus follows that all of the creatures of the world (save for mankind and the *jinn*) are less astray and less 'bestial' than the human beings and *jinn* who are heed-

less of God. Indeed, God confirms this exactly in the Holy Qur'an.

> *And We have indeed urged unto Hell many of the jinn and mankind, having hearts wherewith they do not understand, and having eyes wherewith they do not perceive, and having ears wherewith they do not hear. These, they are like cattle — nay, rather they are further astray. These — they are the heedless.* (*Al-A'raf,* 7:179)

This then is another very potent and powerful reason why Muslims need to respect nature and its creatures: not only were they created by God; not only do they contain signs (*ayat*) of God; not only do they all glorify God in praise, but nature and all its creatures are inherently less astray and thus nobler in God's sight than heedless human beings!

Finally, it should be noted that all creatures form interactive communities ('*umam*', singular: '*umma*') much like ourselves. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> *There is not an animal on earth nor a flying*

> *creature with wings which do not form communities [umam] analogous [amthalukum] to you*. (*Al-An'am*, 6:38)

Each species, then, is an '*umma*', is a divinely-willed community of beings, which are receptacles of 'natural revelation'. Moreover, each one of these communities or species has its own distinct mode of receiving natural revelation (which is precisely what makes it different from any other species), and thus their own way of naturally engaging in prayer and glorification. Each species then has its 'religion' so to speak and a 'people' in itself 'like ourselves', and this in itself should be a powerful warning to us to respect, cherish and empathize with nature and all its creatures.

One of the implications of a truly Qur'anic awareness of the natural world is this: the loss of any kind of species, any kind of creature, is not just a catastrophe, it is a kind of cosmic sacrilege. Each species, being an *umma*, is not just some accidental feature of evolution, the loss of which may be somehow justified by the greater cause

of our progress on the evolutionary scale. On the contrary, it is a direct and blessed manifestation of divine creativity. The loss of any species of life is thus not just tragic, cruel and immoral but blasphemous and a direct revolt against God. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> *Because of that, We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever slays a soul for other than a soul, or for corruption in the land, it shall be as if he had slain mankind altogether; and whoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind. Our messengers have already come to them with clear proofs, but after that many of them still commit excesses in the land.* (*Al-Maida*, 5:32)

It can be inferred from what we have seen above that the extinction of a whole innocent species is as grave as the killing of an innocent soul, and that it is thus comparable to the slaying of all mankind. And God knows best.

Chapter 2 – The Relationship between the Environment and Man

(A) God's Khalifa

Man's rights and responsibilities toward the environment are summarised by the Qur'anic word *khalifa* (viceroy, representative, steward) which God uses to describe Adam (p.b.u.h.) to the Angels:

> *Lo! I am about to place a viceroy on earth* (*Al-Baqara*, 2:30)

God also says about all human beings:

> *He it is Who has made you viceroys on earth …* (*Fatir*, 35:39)

Human beings, then, are God's representatives on earth. Human beings are His stewards. Human beings must then act and live responsibly in this world. This means that if human beings are not charged with maintaining the world, or tending to it, they must at least not

destroy it! Humans are on earth for a limited time and whatever they need for survival is already present on earth. Their provision, as that of all other living beings on the earth has been promised. God states

> *… There shall be for you on earth a habitation and provision for a time* (*Al-Baqara*, 2:36)

and

> *He it is Who hath made the earth subservient unto you, so walk in the paths thereof and eat of His providence* … (*Al-Mulk*, 67:15)

The earth is made subservient to human beings, and she provides for them and benefits them. However, this subservience must be contextualised in the light of what has already been said about everything in nature being created by God, being full of the presence of His Qualities, being in constant praise and glorification of God, and being aware of God. The earth being made subservient to man does not mean that man is free to do all that he pleases without care, or that he is free to upset the balance of nature. God makes this clear in His Words:

> *He created man, / teaching him the [coherent] speech. / The sun and the moon follow a reckoning, / and the grass and the trees prostrate. / And He has raised the heaven and set up the balance, / [declaring] that you should not contravene with regard to the balance. / And observe the measure with justice and do not skimp the balance. / And the earth, He placed it for [all] creatures. / In it are fruits and date-palms with sheaths, / and grain with husk, and fragrant herb. / So which of your Lord's favours will you deny?* (Al-Rahman, 55:3-13)

Human beings thus may not wantonly plunder the earth's resources, damage the environment, and have no consideration for natural sustainability. Although the earth has been subjugated to human beings because human beings are — potentially, when they are righteous — the apex of creation and God's viceroys on earth, they may not act in a way that damages their Lord's creation. Human beings are after all only mere stewards, and not owners. Sovereignty is God's alone:

> *Do you not know that to God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and that you have none, besides God, neither protector, nor helper?* (*Al-Baqara*, 2:107; see also: 5:17-8; 5:40; 5:120; 9:116; 17:111; 24:42; 25:2; 35:13; 39:6; 39:44; 40:16; 42:49; 43:85; 45:27; 48:14; 57:2; 57:5; 64:1; 67:1, and 85:9)

Thus human beings may take only the basic sustenance they need with grateful appreciation of the fact that they did not make this sustenance but that it is a gift from their Creator which they have no right to abuse. God says in the Holy Qur'an

> *And the earth We have spread out (Like a carpet); set thereon Mountains firm and immovable; And produced therein all kinds of things in due balance. And We have provided therein Means of subsistence,— for you And for whose sustenance Ye are not responsible.* (*Al-Hijr*, 15:19-20)

(B) The Macro-Micro Mirror-play

God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> *We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that He is the Truth* … (*Fussilat*, 41:53)

And:

> *And in the earth are signs for those whose faith is sure / And [also] in yourselves. Can ye then not see?* (*Al-Dhariyat*, 51:20-21)

In these verses, God links His signs in the environment with His signs within ourselves. This means that the Divine Metacosm is reflected in both the microcosm which is man and the macrocosm which is the universe. In other words, man is like a small world, and the universe is like a large man, and by recognising the signs in either of these worlds we can come to know the Truth of God, for His signs are both within us and within the world.

Moreover, the inherent beauty of the natural order is matched by the beauty of the creation of man:

> *... Thou canst see no fault in the Beneficent One's creation* (*Al-Mulk*, 67:3)

> *Surely We created man of the best stature* (*Al-Tin*, 95:4)

But whereas the natural world cannot change itself, man can. Because man has freedom of choice he can choose to disregard God's commandments. When man does this he becomes *the lowest of the low* (*Al-Tin*, 95:5). This microcosmic corruption is then bound by the inherent mirror-play between the microcosm and the macrocosm to corrupt the world, both literally through man's actions and spiritually. Thus in the Holy Qur'an, even the Jinn note the changes in the celestial 'climate':

> *And we made for the heaven, but we found it filled with mighty guards and meteors. / And we used to sit in [certain] places therein to listen in; but anyone listening now will find a meteor lying in wait for him.* (*Al-Jinn*, 72:8-9)

Thus mankind's inward corruption is not only reflected in the world's outward corruption, it is its actual cause, both directly and physically (through man's pollution of the world and his upsetting the natural balance), and spiritually and existentially (as man's inner corruption changes the subtle existential conditions of the physical world, by 'solidifying' it and cutting it off from the graces of heaven). This is the real reason why no amount of scientific environmental action can fully work without spiritual renewal within mankind, and why conversely, spiritual renewal needs also environmental action to be successful. This particular insight is what is perhaps most lacking in all the environment-saving efforts of our day: environmentalists think they know the world and can save it without knowing and saving themselves first.

Chapter 3 – Human Corruption and Environmental Pollution

(A) Qur’anic Guidelines for Ecological Balance

The Holy Qur’an sets out complete spiritual and moral ecological guidelines for man. He is told to ‘walk modestly’ on the earth:

> *The [faithful] slaves of the Beneficent are they who walk upon the earth modestly* (*Al-Furqan,* 25:63)

Man is also told to pay his dues and not to be wasteful or extravagant;

> *It is He who produceth Gardens, with trellises And without, and dates, And tilth with produce Of all kinds, and olives And pomegranates, Similar (in kind) And different (in variety): Eat of their fruit In their season, but render The dues that are proper On the day that the harvest s gathered. But waste not by excess: for God Loveth not the wasters.* (*Al-An‘am,* 6:141)

> *... And squander not in wantoness / Lo! The squanderers were ever brothers of the devils,and the devil was ever an ingrate to his Lord* (*Al-Isra'*, 17:26-27)

He is also told not to disrupt the balance that exists in nature;

> *And the sky he has uplifted; and He hath set the measure. / That ye exceed not the measure*. (*Al-Rahman*, 55:7-8)

Likewise, he is told not to change God's creation, which is something that Satan will incite him to do.

> *And I will lead them astray, and give them false hopes, and order them to cut the ears of the cattle, and I will order them to alter the creation of God ...* (*Nisa'*, 4:119)

In our time all of these commandments are ignored, and in fact their opposites are looked upon favourably. We walk arrogantly on the Earth as if we are its owners and can do whatever we want to do. The extravagant and wasteful lifestyles of more and more people can only mean a plundering and destruction of the earth. An

unsustainable lifestyle is shown everywhere as the goal of life, and indeed as a norm to be achieved. To live in such a manner throws the environment out of balance and means that others will live a life of misery and poverty. There are finite resources on earth, and the more that some limited portion of mankind uses, the less is available to others. Tinkering with nature to 'improve' it, is a clear symptom of the hubris which inflicts modern man. Unaware of the intricate relationship among the phenomena of the world, modern man looks upon them as separate, individual entities, which can then be manipulated without regard to other entities. We destroy mountains, but build islands; wipe out forests, but fill the seas with poison and garbage; eliminate wild animals, but clone pets; kill off birds, and make junkyards in the sky; make landfills of junk in the ground, but deplete the earth for its treasures; desertify the plains, but build golf courses in the desert, and so on. The environment, which is a reflection of the Creator, is now being re-formed, to the extent it can be, in the image of man in his corrup-

tion. And yet God has specifically said in the Qur'an not to do this and upset the balance of nature, and has said how we should behave instead, as already cited:

> *He created man, / teaching him the [coherent] speech. / The sun and the moon follow a reckoning, / and the grass and the trees prostrate. / And He has raised the heaven and set up the balance, / [declaring] that you should not contravene with regard to the balance. / And observe the measure with justice and do not skimp the balance. / And the earth, He placed it for [all] creatures. / In it are fruits and date-palms with sheaths, / and grain with husk, and fragrant herb. / So which of your Lord's favours will you deny?* (*Al-Rahman*, 55:3-13)

(B) Moral Transgression and Punishment

When a community degenerates to such an extent that the Prophets and their messages of salvation are totally disregarded, then an inevitable outcome of this will

be a redress, a punishment. This redress comes in the form of a 'natural' disaster such as a flood, a sandstorm, an earthquake etc. Nature reacts to the spiritual corruption of man and the consequences are terrible.

> *Corruption has appeared on earth and at sea because of what the hands of men have wrought; in order that God may make them taste the consequences of their actions; so that they might return' [that is: so that they might return to God]* (*Al-Rum*, 30:41)

What is this 'corruption' on both 'earth and sea' that 'the hands of men have wrought'? For a person reading the Qur'an today, it seems like a powerful prophecy describing our current situation. Our 'hands' have literally corrupted the 'earth and sea' and now we are to 'taste' the consequences of our actions, and those of our predecessors, not simply to be punished, but in order to be alerted to the need to return to God; not in order to become despondent, but on the contrary, more fervent in our resolve to put right what is wrong, and return to that natural equilibrium in which we were created. Tasting

the consequences of 'our' actions means accepting that in a mysterious manner we are not devoid of responsibility for putting right what both we and our predecessors have done; for we, as members of the human race, form an organic unity. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> *Your creation and your resurrection is but as a single soul* ... (*Luqman*, 31:28)

If, however, we do not heed the signs that are so clearly being manifested, then what can we expect? The Qur'an is replete with examples of how communities have been punished through the forces of nature. How nature has redressed the imbalance that man has brought onto earth.

> *So We seized each of them [the various wrongdoers mentioned in the preceding verses] for their sin: among them were those upon whom We unleashed a hurricane, and among them were those who were seized by the Cry, and among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow, and among them were those whom We drowned. But it was not God who wronged them, but rather,*

> *it was they who wronged themselves*. (*Al-'Ankabut*, 29:40)

It is extremely important and interesting to note that in this verse man is destroyed by the four traditional elements: air (the hurricane); fire (the 'cry' or lightening, which is of fiery energy, the symbolism of pure fire as such being reserved in the Holy Qur'an either for hell, or sacredness as in the blessed fire of God [see 27:8-9] or again the sun); water (the flood), and earth (earthquake). Now one should not think to equate the four traditional elements of air, fire, water and earth with modern elements of the modern periodic table, but rather view them as the subtle principles of the four physical states (gas, energy, liquid and matter) most perfectly symbolised by the four naturally evident constitutes of our environment (that is to say, air, fire, water and earth which all of nature consists of in some combination). In other words, man will be destroyed by everything in nature, for he has himself upset the balance of everything in nature.

However, this is not the whole story or even the real

secret of the critical verse cited above. Rather one needs to know also that man himself is composed, according to the Holy Qur'an, of precisely these four cardinal elements whose balance he has upset: God says man was made of dust (*Ghafir*, 40:67) [which is earth]; of clay (*Al-Saafat*, 37:11) [which is earth and water]; of formed dried mud (*Al-Hijr*, 15:26) [which is earth, water and air], and of fired clay (*Al-Rahman*, 55:14) [which is earth, water, air and fire]. Consequently, human beings' sins (i.e. when their bodily nature dominates the Divine Spirit within them — see *Al-Sajdah*, 32:7-9; *Sad*, 38:76 and *Al-Hijr* 15:28-34) partake of these four elements: earth (hence lust and other bodily-based sins); water (emotional or phlegmatic sins); air (mental or sanguine sins); and fire (choleric sins). These sins are personified by the tribes of the Prophet Lut (p.b.u.h.); Pharaoh (or the Prophet Nuh, [p.b.u.h.]); Prophet Hud (p.b.u.h.) who was sent to the people of 'Aad and the Prophet Salih (p.b.u.h.), who were destroyed by stones, water, the wind and lightening respectively (see *Al-Dhariyat*, 51:32-44; *Al-Najm*, 53:50-

53 et al.). Thus God says (as cited above): *So We seized each of them [according to] their sin … But it was not God who wronged them, but rather, it was they who wronged themselves*. (*Al-'Ankabut*, 29:40).

Properly understood this means that not only do our sins cause the destruction of the world indirectly (and hence ourselves along with the world), but rather that our sins *are* the destruction of the world, exactly. The world will thus not stop being destroyed until our sins themselves cease.

Finally, let it also be said here that even though not all on the earth are guilty of abusing it, even the innocent will likely suffer from this abuse, for God has warned:

> *And be afraid of a trial which would certainly not fall exclusively upon the evildoers among you; and know that God is severe in retribution.* (*Al-Anfal*, 8:25)

(C) Eschatology and Nature

God tells us that when the Last Day comes, it will be accompanied by [or preceded by] nature in turmoil

> *When the sun is overthrown. / And when the stars fall. / And when the hills are moved. / And when the camels big with young are abandoned. / And when the wild beasts are herded together. / And when the seas rise*. (*Al-Takwir*, 81:1-6)

> *When the sky is cleft asunder. / When the planets are disperses. / When the seas are poured forth* (*Al-Infitar*, 82:1-3)

Everything done to the earth is recorded and she herself will recount all the deeds carried out on her:

> *When Earth is shaken with [her] final earthquake. / And Earth yieldeth up her burdens. / And man saith: What aileth her? / That day she will relate her chronicles* (*Al-Zalzala*, 99:1-4)

Though nature is today in turmoil, that does not

mean the end is necessarily upon us now if we repent and change. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> *If only there had been one town that believed and profited by its belief — except for the people of Jonah: when they believed, We removed from upon them the chastisement of degradation in the life of this world and We gave them comfort for a while.* (*Yunus*, 10:98)

And:

> *Verily We sent Noah to his people [saying]: 'Warn your people before there come on them a painful chastisement'. / He said, 'O my people, I am indeed a plain warner to you, / [to tell you] that [you should] worship God and fear Him and obey me, / that He may forgive you some of your sins and defer you, until an appointed term. Indeed when God's term comes, it cannot be deferred, if only you knew'.* (*Nuh*, 71:1-4)

This means that though the signs of destruction make the end seem nigh, our repentance could still delay the end of the world, through God's Mercy. God says:

> *Do they not know that God extends His provision for whomever He will, and restricts [it] [for whomever He will?] Truly in that there are signs for a people who believe. / Say [that God declares]: 'O My servants who have been prodigal against their own souls, do not despair of God's mercy. Truly God forgives all sins. Truly He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. / And turn [penitently] to your Lord and submit to Him, before the chastisement comes on you, whereupon you will not be helped.* (*Al-Zumar,* 39:52-54)

The end of the world lies in our hands, by God's Leave, if we are but sincere about changing ourselves and thus delaying it.

Chapter 4 – Human Purification and Environmental Responsibility

(A) Changing Ourselves

What then should be our response? In the light of everything we have discussed, how should we act in order to combat the irresponsible actions and attitudes which we see around us, and in us? The first thing to do is to remember God's words:

> *… Truly God will not change the condition of a people until they change the condition of their own souls* (*Al-Ra'd*, 13:11).

God will not change the condition we find ourselves in, until we first change what is *in* our souls. Our intentions and our attitudes must thus change. We must remember the sacredness of the environment, the praise that all things hymn to their Lord, and both the outward and inward signs of God. This remembrance will alter

the way we perceive things, and this of course will impact our actions. God says:

> *O mankind, eat that which is lawful and wholesome on earth, and do not follow the footsteps of Satan* (*Al-Baqara*, 2:168)

We live in the modern world with all of its trappings. These trappings, however, are not *wholesome on earth.* We travel in cars and on planes, use phones, store food in refrigerators, flush toilets etc. Can we with good conscience use or do anything and feel that we have not contributed to the damage of the environment? Can there be any compromise between the modern lifestyle and respect for the environment? We must believe that there can be. We must believe that there is always a gap, always a choice we can make. By just following the command of the first part of the above verse, and eating food *which is lawful and wholesome* we can change so much. And if we have the strength to follow the command of the second part of the verse, then we will have managed to change the condition of our selves. This is clearly the

difficult part. This is inner *jihad*. The struggle to break our bad habits and to align our very selves with a purer way of living can only be achieved through the aid of sincere prayer. We must rectify our selves on the basis of *faqr* and *dhikr*; simplicity, contentment, resisting endless desires, and then remembering God in all the forms it can take, primarily prayer. After this, changing things in our everyday lives will be easier. Then we can recycle, reuse paper and packaging, conserve water, eat less, waste less food, use less energy and power, forego needless luxuries, avoid all extravagances, preserve our natural environment, not pollute, plant trees, support environmentally-friendly goods and products etc., and above all research and inform ourselves as to how to best do this. In short, we must 'reduce' our modern lifestyles and our own carbon footprints in every act in our — and our children's — daily lives as much as we can so that we really contribute to alleviating this crisis.

(B) Changing our World

God says:

Do you not see how God strikes similitudes? A good word is as a good tree. Its roots are firm and its branches reach up into heaven. It gives forth its fruits in every season, by the leave of its Lord / And the similitude of a bad saying is as a bad tree, uprooted from upon the earth, having no stability. / God confirms those who believe by a firm saying in the life of this world and in the Hereafter; and God sends astray the evildoers; and God does what He will (*Ibrahim,* 14:24-27)

In addition to changing ourselves, we must also help to change the world. This means that we, as Muslims, must spread the Holy Qur'an's good word (about nature) amongst other Muslims (who now constitute around a quarter of the world's population) as to what must be done, and encourage them — just as we encourage ourselves —to do it. We must start with our families and friends, our communities and our countries, remem-

bering that the best word is not a word self-righteously *preached* and which is *uprooted from upon the earth, having no stability,* but rather an example which is *lived* and whose *roots are firm and its branches reach up into heaven.* May the message of the good word of the Holy Qur'an spread far and wide thus giving hope to not only our generation, but the generations to come, *in sha Allah*.